



Planned cuts draw more ire in Marysville school district

By Ashley Gebb/ADagebb

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Marysville Joint Unified teachers, parents and students continued to express their dissatisfaction and disappointment with the district's financial operations on Tuesday night and urged board members to act with more consideration.

No drastic or widespread cuts were up for action at the meeting, yet it was standing-room only, and many people spoke to address the budget during the public comment period. A continued point of contention remains the ending General Fund balances and a gap between budget projections and later actual figures.

Trustees have already authorized several proposed reductions and changes in an attempt at cutting \$3 million from the district's \$80 million budget.

Molly McKay, a second-grade teacher at Kynoch Elementary, said the state requires the school set aside 3 percent of its budget for economic uncertainties, which would be about \$2.4 million. Yet it has significantly more set aside and continues to cut teaching positions, and the last of high school librarians and nurses.

"If I was a parent, I would be very, very angry," McKay said. "If we do have the money and it's sitting in the bank instead, it's just wrong."

Inge Schlussler, a kindergarten teacher at Edgewater Elementary, spoke on behalf of the Marysville Unified Teachers Association once again, to say the numbers board members are presented with do not add up to financial strain.

At the time of the second interim budget in years past, predictions for the expected ending balance have been forecast between \$2.5 million and \$4.8 million less than the actual budget at year's end. The difference may seem small, she said, but it translates to dozens of full-time equivalent positions that don't need to be cut.

"Making teachers fear for their jobs when the district's fund balance is so healthy. That's a mistake," Schlussler said.

Several people mentioned administration as an alternative source for cuts, instead of at the school and classroom level. Steve White, president of the teachers' union, gave a presentation showing the size of district office staff compared to student bodies at various school districts, with Marysville Joint Unified topping the list at 20 staffers for 9,858 students.

In comparison, White said, Yuba City Unified has 12 staffers for 13,200 students and Chico Unified has 13 staffers for 13,060 students.

"If that is cut to the bone, I want to meet your butcher," White said.

During a later presentation on the budget, figures provided by Mark Allgire, assistant superintendent of business services, showed that in the last five years, full-time equivalent positions have dropped by 21 percent in management, supervisory and confidential employees. Comparatively, certificated positions have dropped by 5.4 percent and classified positions have increased by 5.8 percent.

Allgire later declined to comment on the statements made about the budget during public comment.

Several people also spoke on behalf of adult education, including a former graduate, a teenage mother working toward her GED and students learning English as a second language. Cuts have so decimated the program that its existence is in question.

"Please don't close the classes because it will affect our future and our children's future," said Roberto Flores, who stood up on behalf of a crowd of Spanish speakers.

Trustees refuted the assertion that they have any other choice than to progress with precautionary reductions.

"I don't know if there is a \$9 million gap. I never was much of a number cruncher," said Frank Crawford. "But if I thought these people were trying to pull something over on you, I'd be the first to tear them up.

"We are not up here to cheat you. We are not doing this out of spite for you," he continued. "Please don't think anybody up here is enjoying this."

Margaret Markle echoed the sentiment, saying she feels like she is "between a rock and a hard place." Comments at board meetings have pushed her to ask questions about the budget, to which she found sufficient answers, but she is prohibited by fair labor practices from reaching out further to hear from employees themselves.

"I hope you'll have some understanding," Markle said. "We do think things out."

Nikki Nakamura, a teacher in the district, said she was there as a parent and community member and urged the board to look beyond the money figures.

"From my point as a community member, our voices are not being heard," she said. "I feel it is important that you listen. Not just hear what we have to say, but genuinely listen."

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